

Contact: Mary Lou Keenon
Communications
Telephone: 517/373-0011

Brian Conway – 517-643-7134
Martha MacFarlane-Faes – 517-335-2720

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DeTour and Harbor Beach Lighthouses
Transferred from Coast Guard to Local Ownership
on Thursday

Michigan State Housing Development Authority executive director Keith Molin and State Historic Preservation Officer Brian Conway announced that the US General Services Administration transferred the ownership of four lighthouses from the U.S. Coast Guard to local stewards. Lake Huron's DeTour Reef Light, near Drummond Island, and the Harbor Beach Light, in the Harbor Beach Harbor of Refuge were among the four.

The DeTour and Harbor Beach Lights are the first offshore lights granted approval to occupy state-owned bottomlands of the Great Lakes.

"The transfer of these lighthouses out of federal ownership to local stewards will assist in long-term preservation of these offshore lights," stated Molin. "The nonprofits and municipalities associated with these important structures have demonstrated the commitment and the wherewithal necessary to preserve these vital pieces of Michigan's maritime history."

During the 1990s changing technologies, shifting priorities and fiscal constraints caused the Coast Guard to intensify its efforts to dispose of lighthouses throughout the country. In 1998, faced with the impending disposal of numerous Michigan lights, the State Historic Preservation Office formed the Michigan Lighthouse Project, a consortium of government stakeholders, to help facilitate the transfer of lighthouses out of federal ownership and into the hands of local governments or nonprofits who would preserve and maintain the structures.

The Coast Guard declared the **DeTour Reef Light** surplus property in 1997. When the National Trust for Historic Preservation named Michigan lighthouses among the nation's eleven most endangered places in 1998, the DeTour Reef Light was the "poster child" representing some 120 Michigan lighthouses. The DeTour Reef Light Preservation Society formed that same

year and began rehabilitating the lighthouse, which has stood in Lake Huron just south of Drummond Island since 1931. With help from several Michigan Lighthouse Assistance grants, the rehabilitation was completed in 2005 and the society opened the lighthouse for public tours.

The **Harbor Beach Light** is located at the entrance to the harbor. Built in 1885 it stands directly adjacent to the breakwater, which is only accessible by boat. Like many lighthouses supported by a nonprofit organization, the Harbor Beach Light was tended to by the Harbor Beach Lighthouse Preservation Society, which formed in 1984 to care for the light. The Coast Guard declared the lighthouse surplus property in 2004. On Thursday it transferred the lighthouse to the city of Harbor Beach, which is partnering with the Harbor Beach Lighthouse Preservation Society to preserve the lighthouse and open it to the public.

“Many of Michigan’s lighthouses would have been lost if not for the hard work and dedication of the many friend organizations and municipalities that have taken over stewardship of these unique structures,” stated Conway. “These organizations have done a phenomenal job of preserving lighthouses for all of us. Lighthouses are an integral part of Michigan’s landscape and attract numerous visitors each year.”

The transfer ceremony took place as part of the Great Lakes Lighthouse Conference in Traverse City on Thursday, June 17. The conference was hosted by the Michigan Lighthouse Alliance. In addition to the DeTour and Harbor Beach Lights, the Muskegon South Pier Head and South Breakwater Lights were transferred to the Muskegon Lighthouse Conservancy. All four of the lighthouses transferred are listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

You can support the preservation of Michigan’s lighthouses by purchasing a “Save Our Lights” license plate through the Secretary of State. Proceeds from the sale of these plates support the Michigan Lighthouse Assistance Fund.

The State Historic Preservation Office is part of the Michigan State Housing Development Authority. The Michigan State Housing Development Authority is dedicated to building a thriving and vibrant future for Michigan. MSHDA provides tools and resources to improve people’s lives through programs across the state. These programs assist with housing, build strong neighborhoods, and help create places where people want to live and work. MSHDA’s programs work in four areas: affordable rental housing; supporting homeownership; ending homelessness; and creating vibrant cities and neighborhoods. For further information on this or other MSHDA programs, go to www.michigan.gov/mshda.*

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